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Articles in Today's Clips Thursday, March 1, 2007

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After the rain of Ricky, a cold shower



Written by Lawrence Cosentino

City Pulse

Wednesday, 28 February 2007

In the summer of 2005, a 7-year-old Williamston boy seemed to evaporate into thin air. For the next 18 months, a sick drizzle of tragic news drifted down on the city.

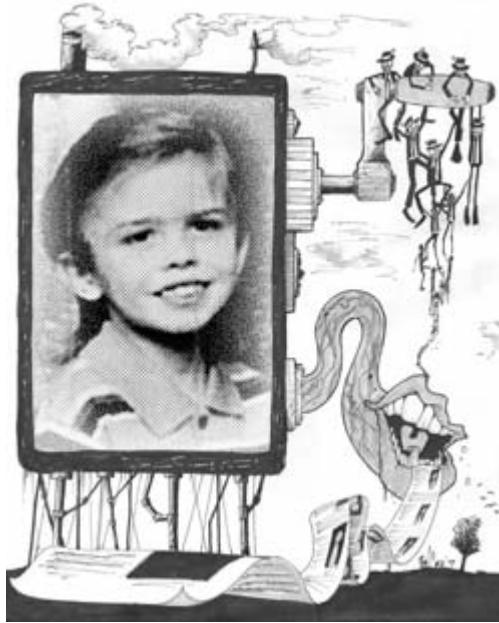
Hundreds of reports in broadcast and print media, including more than 90 stories in the Lansing State Journal, kept the story of Ricky Holland's disappearance and murder in the air until it became a second weather.

The rain of emotional meltdowns and gruesome details fell on the trial's participants and the community alike. Some readers were rapt, others were appalled. Michigan State University journalism professor Eric Freedman called the coverage "over the top." Cooley Law School professor Anthony Flores, who used to work in the Ingham County prosecutor's office, said the trial was "media-driven," the final phase of a "movie of the week" story.

At a forum on Friday, Feb. 23 at Cooley Law School's downtown Lansing campus, the major players in the case described various coping strategies. District Judge Rosemarie Aquilina, who handled the lengthy preliminary hearing, said she "stayed in the zone" and treated the media noise as wallpaper. Circuit Judge Paula Manderfield, who oversaw the trial, said she went into high efficiency mode, lugging a special file cabinet into her office just for the Holland case and hiring a press liaison to handle the glare. Wily prosecutor Michael Ferency played the media for maximum effect, while sardonic defense attorney Andrew Abood resigned himself to widespread public loathing for his client, Lisa Holland.

In addition to those who decried, ignored or exploited the story's hold on the public, there were others who welcomed it. Child welfare advocates, for example, hoped the media attention would direct the public eye toward neglected issues such as child abuse and state monitoring of foster care.

Whether the recent rain of Ricky was a plague, a flood, a blessing, a curse or a mere annoyance depended on the crops you were growing.



Ben Corr/City Pulse

Wetness stand

To outline the facts of the Ricky Holland story, one need only track the various forms of human precipitation that soaked newspaper pages and trickled down TV screens as the case unfolded.

Tears began to bedew broadcast and print media as soon as Ricky Holland was reported missing by his father, Tim Holland, on July 2, 2005. The tears of Ricky's mother, Lisa Holland, proved particularly durable. Much later, at her fall 2006 trial, they would be recycled as the crocodile tears of a child murderer.

When Tim Holland led police to Ricky's body on Jan. 26, 2006, the weather shifted and the season of blood was at hand.

The story peaked with the trial of Lisa Holland, after Tim Holland pleaded guilty and agreed to testify against his wife. Soon the Lansing area was taking in accounts of hammer-inflicted head wounds with its morning cereal. "Spatter showed up in multiple rooms," went the deck on a Sept. 26 LSJ headline. "Blood on shirt probably dripped from Ricky's hair, expert says," read an Oct. 11 headline.

In a revealing lead from Oct. 18, The Grand Rapids Press was refreshingly — if perhaps unintentionally — frank about what it was serving its readers: "Tim Holland testified Tuesday his wife wanted to feed their 7-year-old son to the alligators, yet another gruesome detail about the tragic life of Ricky Holland." (This information, according to the headline, came from a "tearful husband.")

Not all the details were gruesome. Some were just pitiful. “Ricky Holland’s last meal would have been his favorite: Kentucky Fried Chicken,” read the Edna Buchanan-esque lead for the LSJ’s Oct. 12 entry, under the headline “Ricky’s dad watched his son die.”

As Tim Holland turned himself in and the six-week trial of Lisa Holland came to a conclusion, another front bearing tears blew in. “A sometimes sobbing Tim Holland pleaded guilty,” went the Sept. 6 LSJ lead. “The verdict decided, her wrists shackled behind her back, Lisa Holland struggled to wipe a tear from her shoulder,” went the Oct. 28 lead.

Finally, at Lisa Holland’s sentencing Dec. 19, the LSJ led one last time with moisture: “A single teardrop rolled down Lisa Holland’s cheek, as she was sentenced Tuesday to life in prison without parole.”

‘Media crack’

Flores, who brought defense attorneys, prosecution and judges together for Friday’s forum, said the trial was the last act of a unique story with a “movie of the week” feel.

One of those media drivers, Lansing State Journal executive editor Mickey Hirten, used language out of a movie trailer to describe the story’s hold on the city.

“I think it’s an unusual story, a compelling story, a story of abuse and betrayal and many things,” Hirten said in an interview.

“And it also lasted for a long time,” he added. “Few stories have a span of a good year of continually breaking news.”

“These are vivid cases,” said MSU journalism instructor Bonnie Bucqueroux, assistant coordinator of Victims and the Media, a journalism ethics education program at MSU.

Bucqueroux contrasted the allure of the Holland story with the complex particulars of millage elections or sewer bills.

“It doesn’t take that kind of sophistication about the process to understand that there’s a young boy who’s dead and somebody should have been able to save him,” she said.

“That’s an easy story to understand, and easy to tell,” Bucqueroux said. “The real challenge is for the media to tell it well.”

Bucqueroux and fellow MSU journalism professor Sue Carter are collaborating on a book, tentatively titled “Dogs Bark and the Caravan Moves On,” analyzing media coverage of high-profile crimes.

“How many times have you seen that picture of little Ricky, bless his heart?” Carter

asked. “It doesn’t advance the story, it only dwells on what the story has been.”

It’s one thing to inform people what’s expected to happen next in the trial, Carter said — it’s another to continually revisit it, “whether through eyewash or file tape.”

Freedman agreed that local Holland coverage was wasteful and repetitious. “I wouldn’t call it exploitative, I just thought it was boring,” he said. “It bothered me seeing that same little mug shot every day.”

“It’s a cycle,” Carter said. “People want to know, the media provides, and then people want to know more.”

Bucqueroux put it more bluntly.

“The challenge has always been, how do you get people to eat the spinach when they have media crack?”

Leading and bleeding

To the LSJ’s Hirten, the blood-and-tears leads accurately reflected the news of the day. (Kevin Grasha, who did most of the Holland reports for the LSJ, declined to comment for this article.)

“We do the best stories we can, and we report the stories we find,” Hirten said. “This was often what the news of the day was, and to not report that would be problematical for us.”

Flores said most of the coverage he saw stemmed from witness testimony on the stand. “That’s fair game,” Flores said. “That’s why we have trials — to get a witness’s perspective.”

“If it happens in open court, it is absolutely fair game,” Cheryl Fritze, the court’s media coordinator, agreed. “If it bleeds, it leads — we all hear that on day one of Journalism 101.”

At the Cooley forum, Manderfield declared her self satisfaction with the media coverage. “With Cheryl Fritze’s help, I think the reporting was very accurate,” she said.

Media critics who followed the Holland case picked few, if any, bones with the media’s accuracy. Emphasis, amount and placement of stories, however, were another matter.

Once a major story builds there is often pressure to wring something out of each day’s developments, however meager, Freedman explained. For example, on Sept. 12, 2006, an uneventful day of tedious jury selection, the LSJ led with an account of two courthouse visitors who came to the trial from Fenton and released seven balloons in front of the courthouse. The balloons, the story explained, “represented each year of Ricky’s short

life.”

Such daily milking further inflated the hundreds of TV minutes and column inches already devoted to the story.

The recaps and filler stories troubled Freedman more than the gory, sensational details.

“How much of it do you think your readers really want?” Freedman said. “How much else could you be doing with that space?”

The opportunity cost of all those column inches was not a concern for the Hirten. “I never really thought of it in those terms,” he said.

“There’s an opportunity cost to virtually everything we do every day,” Hirten said. “We have opportunity costs in what we cover, how we cover them, where we cover them. I don’t really think that applied. In this case, it was a story that engaged the community in so many ways, and a story that just had to be told.”

Freedman said was no shortage of child abuse stories in 2006, but none of them came close to the attention the Holland case received.

“When you write about child abuse, it has a broader effect,” Hirten explained. “It increases awareness, and it raises public policy issues. Yeah, there are other [cases] that could be covered, but covering any one of them helps deal with the fundamental problem and gets people thinking about it.”

In the wake of the trial, the LSJ and other Michigan newspapers published several stories on the need for foster care reform. Most of these “spinach” stories were published after the trial was over and the case became a political football between Gov. Jennifer Granholm and her Republican challenger in the gubernatorial race, Dick DeVos.

But the balance was way off, Bucqueroux said. “A lot of it was, yet another picture, yet another few quotes, no real news, but because there was so much public interest they had to publish something every day.”

Weathering the storm

The attorneys and judges at the Cooley forum were keen to paint a picture of inexorable justice, coolly delivered under a hot battery of media lights.

“They can call it a media circus — and I guess to some extent it was, because everybody was interested in it — but it did not affect how I ruled, what I did, the length of the case or anything else people have conjectured upon,” Aquilina said. “We got in the zone.”

Putting a jury together was among the toughest challenges the court faced, Manderfield said. “Because of the media attention the case was getting, it was something we weren’t

sure we could do in this county,” she said at the forum. To meet the challenge, the court cast an unusually wide net of 300 prospective jurors, winnowing them down by intensive questionnaires and one-on-one interviews.

The court’s next problem was to manage the daily inquiries of more than a dozen news organizations, from local print and broadcast outlets to media from Detroit, Flint, Grand Rapids and Bay City. National media, including Court TV’s Nancy Grace, CNN and Fox News pulled feeds from local stations.

Before the trial, Manderfield tapped Fritze, a former news anchorwoman, as court liaison between the court and the press. As a journalist and court employee, Fritze was well positioned to reconcile voracious media hunger with the more sober goals of the criminal justice system.

“I’m fascinated, as most people are, with court drama,” she said. “Also, I’m still an investigative reporter at heart.”

The hairdresser gambit

By the time Lisa Holland’s trial began in September 2006, public interest had been honed to a fine edge by the false-disappearance drama of summer 2005.

Andrew Abood, co-counsel for Lisa Holland, had no choice but to suck it up as the trial opened in October 2006. “I don’t know that there was anything we could do on this case to affect the public opinion of my client,” he said.

Of all the players at Friday’s forum, Abood came closest to expressing real frustration with media coverage of the trial.

“Not all of the facts were presented the same way in the courtroom as in the media, but that’s the media’s prerogative,” he said dryly.

During the trial, the acid-tongued Abood left many media inquiries to less volatile co-counsel Michael Nichols, but at the forum, Abood couldn’t resist telling a war story.

On Sept. 28, Abood recalled, two crucial witnesses took the stand at the Lisa Holland trial: Dr. Aurif Abedi, who diagnosed Ricky Holland with three personality disorders, and Michigan State Police Detective Sgt. Frank Mraz, the officer whom Tim Holland directed to Ricky’s body on Jan. 27, 2006.

The two witnesses were on the stand until late in the afternoon, Abood recalled, and their testimony was dramatic. Mraz even got off the stand and knelt before the jury to show how Tim Holland had knelt on the ground and said, “Oh my God, what have I done, what have I done?”

“I’m thinking, ‘Wow, this is great!’” Abood said. “The last witness of the day was a

nothing witness! It was the beauty parlor lady, the hairdresser.”

But when “nothing witness” Felicity Rall took the stand, she testified that Lisa Holland had visited her hair salon during the community-wide search for her missing son.

“It killed us,” Abood said. “The headlines in the paper had nothing about Abedi, nothing about Frank Mraz. Five paragraphs, front page, about the hairdresser.”

At this outburst by Abood, prosecutor Michael Ferency, a gaunt, red-faced veteran with a gravelly voice, leaned back in his chair. “I anticipated exactly what would happen with that witness,” he told the Cooley audience.

Fritze said she also saw it coming. “I knew the hairdresser would lead, in spite of the extraordinary testimony we heard that afternoon,” she said. “She comes in and says the woman is in her chair getting her eyebrows waxed while the rest of the world is looking for her son — that’s unbelievable. That was too good a headline not to lead.”

Not fade away

If media coverage of the Ricky Holland case dwelled more on soap opera than underlying social and political issues, that’s all right with some advocates of children’s rights who say they will take whatever they can get.

Aquilina said she has dealt with thousands of child abuse cases, yet she credits the furor over the Holland case with helping her persuade the state Legislature to pass a bill that enables judges to put persons convicted of fourth degree child abuse, a misdemeanor, on five years’ probation instead of two.

“This case, tragic as it was, will open doors for children in this state,” Aquilina said. “Child abuse and neglect, something no one wants to talk about, was brought to the surface.”

Susan Lambiase is associate director of Children’s Rights, the New York-based advocacy group that filed a class-action lawsuit against Michigan’s Department of Human Services in August 2006. It’s an ambitious, *Brown v. Board of Education*-scaled lawsuit seeking a court order for massive welfare reform in Michigan.

The suit calls for sweeping measures, including hundreds of new caseworkers, expanded medical and mental health services, and drastic cuts in time spent waiting for adoption — measures that go far beyond reforms announced by state agencies as the Holland case simmered last summer and fall.

“The Ricky Holland story is the horrific result of a system gone awry,” Lambiase said. “He was in a foster home before he was adopted. He told folks he was being abused by Mrs. Holland.

They did a shoddy investigation, and not only left him there to be further abused, but let him get adopted by them. That is the epitome of bad case practice.”

The web of informational safeguards meant to protect children’s confidentiality only ends up shielding the agencies themselves from public scrutiny, Lambiase said. Media attention, she said, is an important tool for piercing this bureaucratic shield.

However, as Bucqueroux and Carter’s book has it, the caravan will probably move on, even after Lansing’s highest-profile criminal case in decades.

“Of course, there’s always a danger that folks pay attention when there’s a death and media attention on the death,” Lambiase said. “Then it fades into the background until the next tragedy occurs.”

Police seek man accused of burning baby

February 28, 2007

Pontiac police are looking for a 28-year-old Pontiac man who is charged with first-degree child abuse after authorities say he burned a 1-year-old child multiple times with a cigarette lighter earlier this month.

Stephen Duane Keels faces charges that include assault with intent to do great bodily harm, assault with a dangerous weapon and one count of felony torture. If convicted on the torture charge, he faces up to life in prison.

Pontiac Police Sgt. William Ware said officers got a call from the emergency room at St. Joseph's Mercy Oakland on Feb. 1 after the boy's mom brought him in for burns.

The boy suffered burns to his neck, calves and thighs. The mom told police her boyfriend Keels, who had been with the child, said the boy picked up a lighter and burned himself. Investigators determined the claims not to be true. Keels did not comply to an agreement to turn himself into police this week. The child has since been removed from the home.

Police ask anyone with information on Keels' whereabouts to call the police department at 248-758-3341 or 248-758-3395 anytime.

Contact STAN DONALDSON at sdonaldson@freepress.com.

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Old video brings abuse charges for Canton man

March 1, 2007

By STAN DONALDSON

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A 27-year-old Canton Township man was charged with second-degree child abuse earlier this week after police say the mother of a toddler found an old tape of him binding the child's eyes, hands, feet and mouth with duct tape.

Andre Montgomery was charged on Monday in 35th District Court. Canton Township Police Sgt. Rick Pomorski said Montgomery was arrested Sunday after the child's mother found a tape inside their Canton home of the man binding the boy, who was about 2 ½ years old.

The boy's arms were tied behind his back, and he was unable to move. The child is now 4½ and is OK, Pomorski said.

If convicted, Montgomery could face up to 4 years in prison. He is being held at the Wayne County Jail and bond was set at \$50,000. His preliminary exam is March 9.

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Man accused of sexual abuse

By [Daniel Pepper](#)
Staff Writer

Wednesday, February 28, 2007 9:09 AM EST

A 5-year-old girl from the Plainwell/Otsego area testified in Allegan County District Court that her daycare provider's husband sexually molested her at least three times before she told her mother what was happening.

The man, Guy Edward Byer, 42, was bound over by district Judge Joseph S. Skocelas for trial in circuit court on three counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, Wednesday, Feb. 21.

The alleged victim testified from behind a screen that kept her from seeing Byer.

"I have to tell the judge what Gator did to me," she said, after being asked if she knew why she was in court by assistant Allegan County prosecutor Julie Nakfoor-Pratt.

She explained that "Gator" was Guy Byer.

"He's my babysitter's husband," she said.

The girl went to the day care provider in Allegan Township run by Byer's wife, Kim.

Nakfoor-Pratt asked the girl what had happened.

She described in graphic detail what the accused had her do to him.

The girl said this had happened only when her day care provider occasionally watched her at night, not during the day and only when the woman went out for a while and left the alleged victim with her husband and children.

The girl described performing oral sex on Byer at least twice and him trying to have anal sex with her at least once. She also described "the naked thing" on TV that she said they'd watched together.

"It's about penises," she said.

The girl's mother testified that her daughter came out of the den one night where she'd been watching a movie and told her what was happening.

"Looking back, there's some things that I realized I should have known something was wrong," the mother said.

She testified that Kim, the babysitter, had her permission to leave her daughter with her own children and husband when she went out on errands or to work out.

"I felt safe knowing that there were other children there," the mother said.

Nakfoor-Pratt asked Skocelas for bind over.

"She's describing to this court what happened to her from a five-year-old's viewpoint of how things are done," she said. "This young lady has details. I don't think there's any way this child would have had the knowledge to make this up."

Byer's attorney, James Mikel McEwen, pointed out that the girl's story had changed in describing some of the

alleged abuse.

"There have been two interviews before and the changed testimony today makes this child's credibility less, not more," McEwen said.

The hearing, he said, had such a low standard of proof that he wouldn't present much of his case, but he did point out this was an isolated incident.

"They interviewed every other child that they've ever had in their care and there was no other abuse alleged," he said.

McEwen said police had also extensively interviewed Byer's own children and found no evidence of any abuse.

He asked Skocelas to modify the bond agreement for Byer, who is currently out on a \$50,000 bond, so he could see his own children.

"They're having a forced separation from their father," he said. "They should have some contact with their father, for their own good. Supervised visits, naturally, but these boilerplate bond conditions don't allow for that at all."

Skocelas refused.

"Frankly, if I were to amend the bond, it would be to increase it to \$100,000," he said.

Next, he spoke to Byer directly.

"I think as a matter of public safety you shouldn't be around any children under 16," Skocelas said. "That may be detrimental to your kids and I'm sorry for that, but I believe it is a public safety issue."

The judge said he'd bind Byer over.

"We have a very mature 5-year-old victim," Skocelas said. "I took some time with her and made sure it was clear that she had to tell the truth in a court hearing and that she knew the truth from a lie. She spoke as a 5-year-old would and not as someone in my opinion who was coached."

Byer was first arrested in January.

Dan Pepper can be reached at dpepper@allegannews.com or at (269) 673-5534.

Press and Argus

March 1, 2007

Court Docket: Mom arraigned on kidnapping charge

The Livingston County Sheriff's Department said Wednesday that the Howell-area girl who was the subject of an Amber Alert is now at a safehouse because she said she would run away if returned to her legal guardian.

Meanwhile, the 16-year-old girl's mother, Debbie Lynn Renaud, 31, of Royal Oak, pleaded not guilty in Livingston County District Court to a parental kidnapping charge.

The mother was being held in the county jail in lieu of a \$25,000 cash or surety bond and is expected in court Wednesday for an exam conference.

Police say Debbie Renaud requested visitation with her daughter — Christina Renaud, of Oceola Township — last week and was to return the teen to her legal guardian Sunday. However, the teen didn't turn up or contact her guardian as planned, and the Livingston County prosecutor's office on Tuesday authorized an arrest warrant against Debbie Renaud for parental kidnapping. Also, police issued an Amber Alert for Christina Renaud on Tuesday.

Royal Oak police arrested the mother Wednesday afternoon, and Christina Renaud was voluntarily turned into the police department by a friend of her mother's.

Detective Lt. Todd Luzod of the Livingston County Sheriff's Department said the girl indicated to police that she would run away if returned to her guardian, who agreed to allow the girl to stay at a local teen safehouse.

Why the girl did not want to be returned to her guardian was not released.



02/21/2007

Bad Axe man in critical condition

TRACI L. WEISENBACH , The Huron Daily Tribune

MARLETTE TOWNSHIP — Five people, including former Bad Axe Mayor William Cleland and his wife Deborah, received injuries in a head-on two-vehicle crash Monday night.

According to a press release from the Michigan State Police Sandusky Post, troopers were dispatched at about 6:24 p.m. to M-53 and Reynolds Road. The preliminary investigation showed Amalia Grapsidis, 62, from Warren was driving southbound at a high rate of speed, passing other south-bound vehicles.

Grapsidis had two passengers in her vehicle at the time of the crash — 62-year old Lynne Gucwa of Bad Axe and 13-year old Paul Rochon, Grapsidis' grandson.

The Grapsidis vehicle crossed the center line, striking a car driven by William Cleland, 48, of Bad Axe. Deborah, 45, was the only passenger, the press release stated.

All five subjects were transported to Marlette Hospital for treatment of injuries sustained. William Cleland was later air lifted to Hurley Hospital and is still listed in critical condition.

Michigan State Police Third District crash reconstructionists responded to the scene from Saginaw and Lapeer. Investigation of the cause of the crash continues. Alcohol does not appear to be a factor, but has yet to be ruled out. Troopers were assisted at the scene by the Marlette Police Department, Marlette Fire and Rescue, and the Marlette EMS.

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Published March 1, 2007

States lax in oversight of child care, survey says

Military's system gets highest grade for its regulation

By David Crary
Associated Press

NEW YORK - Many states are distressingly lax in their regulation and oversight of child care centers, according to a new nationwide survey which gives its lowest marks to Idaho and Louisiana and its highest grade to the far-flung system run by the U.S. military.

Among the common problems in the states are infrequent inspections, deficient safety requirements, and low hiring standards - including lack of full criminal background checks - for center employees.

"State child care standards and oversight in this nation are not protecting our children and are not preparing them for success in school," said Linda Smith, executive director of the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, which was releasing the first-of-its-kind ranking Thursday.

She urged action by Congress and state legislatures. An estimated 12 million children under age 5 are in non-parental child care each week.

The association reviewed policies and regulations for all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the Defense Department, which ranked a decisive No. 1 overall and led both subcategories - one measuring



(Photo by Associated Press)

High marks: In this photo from the U.S. Department of Defense, a boy shows off a new learning program for Karen Rudolph and U.S. Air Force Capt. Bill Charlton on Feb. 13 at the Child Development Center in Germany.

State rankings

In alphabetical order, how the 50 states, the Defense Department and the District of Columbia were ranked by the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies. (Note there are some ties in the rankings):

- Alabama: 31
- Alaska: 18
- Arizona: 37
- Arkansas: 42
- California: 47
- Colorado: 40
- Connecticut: 25
- Defense Dept.: 1
- Delaware: 25
- D.C.: 25
- Florida: 28
- Georgia: 35
- Hawaii: 14
- Idaho: 52
- Illinois: 2
- Indiana: 18
- Iowa: 37
- Kansas: 47
- Kentucky: 49
- Louisiana: 51
- Maine: 44
- Maryland: 4
- Massachusetts: 18
- Michigan: 7
- Minnesota: 10
- Mississippi: 31

standards that are in place, the second measuring how vigorously the standards are enforced.

"Standards are meaningless without oversight," Smith said. "The Defense Department has good enforcement, and that has brought their program to a much higher level."

Following the military atop the rankings were Illinois, New York, Maryland, Washington, Oklahoma, Michigan, North Dakota, Tennessee, Minnesota and Vermont.

Idaho ranked last; the next lowest scores were for Louisiana, Nebraska, Kentucky, California and Kansas.

Criteria for the rankings included caseloads for center inspectors, frequency of inspections, health and safety requirements, background checks, staff qualifications and activities offered to children.

- Missouri: 29
- Montana: 31
- Nebraska: 50
- Nevada: 12
- New Hampshire: 43
- New Jersey: 22
- New Mexico: 45
- New York: 2
- North Carolina: 22
- North Dakota: 7
- Ohio: 34
- Oklahoma: 6
- Oregon: 35
- Pennsylvania: 15
- Rhode Island: 15
- South Carolina: 30
- South Dakota: 37
- Tennessee: 7
- Texas: 12
- Utah: 45
- Vermont: 10
- Virginia: 15
- Washington: 4
- West Virginia: 18
- Wisconsin: 24
- Wyoming: 41

The report, "We Can Do Better," said eight states do not even require annual inspections of child care centers, let alone conduct them quarterly as Smith's association recommends. The association also advises that each inspector have no more than 50 centers to monitor; the report said 21 states have caseloads of more than 140 per inspector.

Regarding staff, the report said 21 states have no minimum educational requirement for child care teachers; it said only New Jersey and the Defense Department require center directors to have a bachelor's degree.

The military's system, which has expanded and improved dramatically over the past 15 years, encompasses more than 740 facilities worldwide with spaces for 184,000 children.

Its training and safety standards are considered state-of-the-art.

"We've worked hard for a lot of years so service members can do their jobs and not have to worry about their children," said Barbara Thompson, director of the Pentagon's children and youth office.

Idaho's low ranking came as no surprise to state Rep. George Sayler, who has been trying unsuccessfully for three years to tighten regulation of child care centers. Oversight is minimal for Idaho centers with fewer than 13 children; many are not required to be licensed, and employees do not need first-aid training or a high school degree.

CAA fighting allegations of abuse at day care center

[Jan Bellamy](#), Staff Writer
517.437.6016

Community Action Agency is appealing a recommendation for disciplinary action against its license to operate the child day care and Head Start programs at Waldron Area Schools. The recommendation came in a letter dated Jan. 12 from the Department of Human Services (DHS), Office of Children and Adult Licensing.

Advertisement

CAA denies all allegations in the reports filed with DHS following a complaint reported in December. The incident involved two minors and allegations of inappropriate touching. The latter is being handled in Hillsdale County's Youth Court System following an investigation by the Hillsdale County Sheriff's Department.

The DHS investigation specifies licensing violations, such as insufficient ratio of number of caregivers to children, while providing graphic details of the underlying incident. The filer of the report indicates the alleged touching incident could not have taken place if supervision and volunteer screening had been handled adequately. CAA staff deny licensing violations.

"We had three staff and three volunteers in the room with 14 children that day," said Mary Cunningham-DeLuca, director of education services for CAA, based in the Jackson office of the tri-county service agency. DeLuca spoke to the alleged licensing violations, without directly addressing the incident that preceded the licensing investigation.

"We have 100 percent support of the parents, of the schools," said DeLuca. "Although the child in question is no longer in the program, another was enrolled."

Superintendent John McGonigle, Waldron Area Schools, did not respond to questions by telephone. McGonigle deferred comment to DeLuca.

"The investigation is complete, and the agency has made recommendations, which I can't reveal publicly," said Maureen Sorbet, spokesperson for Department of Human Services in Lansing.

"The appeals process could take several months to resolve," said Sorbet. "In the meantime, (CAA) can continue to operate the center, as long as they show there is no danger to children."

CAA executive director Marsha Kreucher stresses the agency takes all precautions to protect children and was "stunned" at the touching allegations.

"Within 24 hours of being advised of the allegation, we notified Child Protective Services and the Hillsdale County Sheriff's Department," said Kreucher. "We sent a letter to all the parents. We still have 100 percent attendance and the safety of the children is foremost."

Community Action Agency notes no accusations have been made against a staff member. The accused is a juvenile who served as a student volunteer in the program.

"All volunteers have been removed from the classroom," said DeLuca. "We are operating with sufficient staff in the room with the children, which has always been our policy. And we do have a volunteer screening process in place. It's posted on the wall."

The touching event is alleged to have occurred Dec. 20, 2006. A four-year-old girl reported being touched by a 16-year-old male volunteer. The juvenile is scheduled for preliminary examination in youth court Mar. 16. The potential charge at this time is considered a felony, but details are rarely shared publicly due to a commitment to protection of minors.

“The juvenile magistrate will make sure the youth’s rights are respected and he knows what the charges are,” said Neal Brady, prosecuting attorney. “The accused is being represented by an attorney from Jackson. Subject to what happens at the preliminary examination, the case could be passed to probate court judge Michael Nye for pretrial hearing.”

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Press and Argus

March 1, 2007

Watchdog arraigned on misdemeanor

A Brighton woman known for being a government watchdog was arraigned Wednesday on a misdemeanor charge of operating an unregistered day-care business even though she says she no longer cares for children at her home.

The Livingston County prosecutor's office has charged Susan Walters-Steinacker with violating the state's child-care organizations act. She pleaded not guilty and asked for a court-appointed attorney.

Walters-Steinacker, 52, is free on a \$500 personal bond and is expected back in court March 19 for a pretrial hearing.

If convicted as charged, Walters-Steinacker could face up to 90 days in jail and/or a \$100 to \$1,000 fine.

Prosecutors allege Walters-Steinacker did not register her in-home day-care business as required by state law. She says she has not cared for children at her home since the start of 2007.

"I don't baby-sit here anymore," Walters-Steinacker, who has made a name for questioning and investigating local officials, said in a February interview. "I baby-sit at their (clients') homes."

In Michigan, anyone who provides day care for one to six unrelated children in a private home for more than four weeks in a year must register with the Department of Human Services, while those who care for seven or more children must apply for a license.

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March 1, 2007

Relationships

Rocky road leads orphan into prosecutor's care

Rachel Abramowitz / Los Angeles Times

Considering her mother tried to throw her out of a third-story window when she was 3, and she spent five years in an orphanage in the destitute former Soviet republic of Georgia and five years in U.S. foster homes, a psychiatric hospital and a lockdown facility for troubled kids, Milena Slatten, 20, is faring incredibly well.

Two years ago, she was homeless, but she's earned her GED and works full time as a clerk in the Los Angeles County courthouse. She has no criminal record. She doesn't drink. She doesn't smoke or do drugs. When she was a child, social workers filled her with a cocktail of mood stabilizers that left her days blurry. Now she would rather be depressed than zonked out.

A positive role model

Most importantly, she has a friend -- an impressive, reliable one -- which is a rarity for former foster kids. He is Thomas Higgins, 65, a career prosecutor responsible for almost all the arraignments in the city of Los Angeles. She calls him Tommy.

Although studies have shown the importance of positive adult role models for kids leaving foster care, a 2004 report by the Government Accountability Office described how difficult it was for states to recruit people to serve as mentors. Higgins, for example, has been spending 50 to 60 hours a month for the past 11 months essentially trying to rescue Slatten.

For all her progress, there are continual pitfalls. For Higgins, it is a test of faith and fortitude; for Slatten, it is a struggle to learn to trust.

"I am the type of person to usually obliterate or basically ruin a relationship because I feel someone is getting close to me," she says.

Job tuns into a relationship

Slatten met Higgins when he showed up at a mixer for potential mentors at Covenant House, a Hollywood homeless shelter where she was living. She called him the next day about a job, and he hired her for \$8.50 an hour.

Higgins watches over her from a cluttered office high atop the courthouse, with panoramic views of the city and evidence of a life well-lived, including professional citations and pictures of his eight grown kids.

The former head of the district attorney's sex crimes and juvenile divisions, didn't start out to save her. "I was just trying to get her a job," he says, but then Slatten showed up for the first day of work looking like a "trustee from the county jail.

The past weighs on Slatten

"She had this look of rejection like I'd kicked her," he recalls.

Despite day-to-day devotion to big and small issues, Higgins couldn't trump the pull of the past. At the end of the summer, Slatten announced she was quitting the district attorney's office, leaving her Covenant House subsidized apartment and returning to Indiana to live with her adoptive father, Christopher Slatten.

This was the man who with his wife had adopted her from the Georgian orphanage and later was arrested and charged with neglect for allegedly locking Milena in a feces-strewn basement, and with battery for allegedly stripping her down and touching her "in an insolent manner."

Slatten was acquitted of the charges, but that didn't make Higgins feel any better about her going back to live with him.

Higgins tried to talk her out of going, but Milena persisted. "I can't make a decision based on other people's opinions. I'll never be able to think for myself," she said.

Milena has never simply acquiesced to Higgins' advice. "Basically the air between Tom and I can get sometimes pretty steamy," she said, as in steaming mad. 'I just don't agree with some stuff he has to say, and I pout and, as he would say, 'have storm clouds on my face.' But I guess that's what makes our relationship work."

Road was paved with hurt

She recalls little about her early life except for her first mother trying to coax her out the third-story window. "She told me, 'You want to jump or do you want me to help you out?' " Milena said. Neighbors rescued her, which is how she ended up in the orphanage. She said that while there, she was beaten with a rod and molested by one of the female workers, which cemented her distrust of women.

A video was taken of her and other orphans, and at the age of 10 she was put on a train to Moscow and told she was going to meet a new mommy and daddy.

Her first prospective mother paid \$30,000 in orphanage fees but then refused to take her after Milena kicked her in the shin. Then came Chris and Beth Slatten, a devout Christian couple who had seen how pitiful she looked in the video. They picked her up at a Moscow train station and brought her back to live with them and their three daughters in Hawaii, where Slatten was stationed as an accountant with the Army.

In January 1999, after the family moved to Indiana, Beth Slatten packed her five biological children into a car and drove home to West Virginia, leaving behind her husband, Milena, and four foster children, siblings ages 9 to 16 whom the Slattens had been in the process of adopting. A few days later, Chris Slatten tried to kill himself. The police investigated. Two weeks later, Child Protective Services removed Milena. Chris Slatten lost the foster kids as well.

Milena feels pressure

Last summer, Milena came to spend a weekend with Higgins and his family at a rented beach house, but the day Higgins returned from vacation, Milena announced that she was going back to Slatten.

Higgins wonders whether the pressure to succeed was too much. "Up to nine months ago, she's a victim," he said. "She's no longer a victim, but with that comes the liability of responsibility."

The night before she was to leave, she finally admitted why she was going. "I basically feel that he (Slatten) owes me something," she said. "An apology."

But after an unpleasant week of arguing with Slatten and revulsion at the memories of her former Indiana home -- "I can't get the smell of the basement out of my nose," she says -- Milena has called Higgins. He paid for her return flight to Los Angeles. The next afternoon, Higgins and his wife picked up Milena at the airport.

They take her back to the Covenant House shelter.

Upon her return, Milena is frustrated by her inability to make her life go forward.

And she's angry.

Higgins' wife has been asking him of late what he'll do if he can't ultimately help Milena, or if she ends up back on the streets. "Part of leadership," he says, "is the will to take things on against long odds. ... I'll cry a lot, but ultimately I can look myself in the mirror and say I gave it everything I had."

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Bobby Brown freed from jail after paying child support

March 1, 2007

ASSOCIATED PRESS

CANTON, Mass. — Bobby Brown paid \$19,000 in late child support and court fees and was freed after spending three nights in the Norfolk County jail.

Brown, who was released Wednesday night, was scheduled to appear Thursday in Norfolk Probate and Family Court, a familiar place for the 38-year-old singer, who has a long history of failing to pay support on time.

A judge had ordered Brown held in the county jail in Dedham until he made the payments after he was arrested while watching his daughter's cheerleading competition at Attleboro High School.

Phaedra Parks, an attorney in Atlanta where Brown lives, said the singer has been struggling to meet monthly payments to Kim Ward, of Stoughton, the mother of two of his teenage children. Brown and Whitney Houston, who have a daughter, are divorcing after 14 years of marriage.

"Although this agreement was put in place when he was Bobby Brown the star, this agreement is being enforced when he is not always able to find work," Parks told The Associated Press. "He hasn't made an album in quite some years."

Brown, a Boston native best known for a solo hit "Don't Be Cruel," has a history of legal troubles. In June 2004, he was sentenced to 90 days in prison for missing three months of payments. That sentence was immediately suspended after Brown paid about \$15,000.

Last March, Brown was nabbed for minor motor vehicle violations dating back 14 years when he arrived to watch his daughter at a cheering competition at Bartlett High School. Brown was cooperative and allowed to drive to the police station after the competition, police said.

In October, Brown paid \$11,000 in delinquent child support after being threatened with arrest if he stepped back into Massachusetts. He owed more than two months' worth of payments to Ward.

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Troubled teen remains on the run

Clinton Twp. juvenile has long crime record

March 1, 2007

BY STEVE NEAVLING

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The trouble started when he broke a classroom window at age 11.

Before he turned 16 this month, Jordan Danski had assaulted classmates and his grandmother, broken into cars, passed counterfeit cash and possessed marijuana, juvenile records show.

Now, he is on the run after escaping Tuesday from the Juvenile Justice Center in Mt. Clemens with two other teens. Police captured the others.

It is the second time in less than two years the Clinton Township teen fled the center.

"He's had a hard life," his grandmother and guardian Betty Danski said Tuesday. "He doesn't know his father, his mom is a drug addict, he's biracial and the system has let him down."

Police said Wednesday that they found Danski's jail uniform along the road in Clinton Township. They say they believe he hitched a ride from someone he knows.

When he escaped, Danski was waiting to be transferred to Maxey Training Center in Whitmore Lake after he beat a classmate with a helmet and broke into at least three cars.

Danski also fled the Mt. Clemens facility in May 2005 with three other teens by bolting through an open gymnasium door and escaping through an area under construction. All were captured 25 minutes later.

Danski's escape at 7:20 p.m. Tuesday occurred after officials say an employee broke rules by allowing three teens in a waiting room at once. They pressed a button to unlock a door and sprinted out.

The 10-year employee is on leave pending an investigation. Charles Seidelman, the center's director, said the employee's actions were "completely unacceptable."

Danski has been in and out of juvenile homes most of his teenage years. The longest stint was six months at Nokomis Challenge Program in Prudenville. While there, he assaulted other inmates. The center said Danski, 5-feet-10 and 170 pounds, "possesses the potential for violent conduct."

Anyone with information can call the Sheriff's Office at 586-469-5151.

Contact **STEVE NEAVLING** at sneavling@freepress.com.

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March 1, 2007

Mount Clemens

Teen on run escaped before

2 caught after leaving juvenile center hunt on for boy, 16

Jim Lynch / The Detroit News

MOUNT CLEMENS -- Police are searching for a 16-year-old who escaped from the Macomb County Juvenile Justice Center, the second time officials say he has done that since 2005.

Jordan Danski had been in custody on a charge of assault with a dangerous weapon.

Two other youths, ages 15 and 16, escaped at the same time but were captured within hours.

In 2005, Danski was among four youths who escaped from the center by breaking through a gymnasium door when the area was being remodeled. Among that group was Eric Schorling, a 16-year-old who was awaiting sentencing for attempted murder in the stabbing of his ex-girlfriend at Romeo High School.

All who were part of that 2005 breakout were found and returned.

Deputies with the Macomb County Sheriff's Office and members of the Clinton Township Police Department continued to search for Danski Wednesday after finding some of his clothing earlier along Canal Road.

"The Sheriff's Office intends to charge the three youths with escape, which is a four-year felony," said Macomb County spokesman Phil Frame. "Therefore, anyone who is helping this guy could be guilty of abetting an escapee."

Wednesday morning, the center's director, Charles Seidelman, told county commissioners how the teens had made their escape.

The youths had been brought to an area at the rear of the facility to make phone calls.

Typically, Seidelman said, one inmate is allowed to use the phone while the others are held in a separate cell or room. But the employee in charge of the inmates left them together, which he described as a failure of protocol.

The trio took advantage of an opportunity to activate an automatic door and they slipped out.

"The staff member has been placed on administrative leave pending an appeal," Seidelman told commissioners.

Anyone with information regarding Danski's location is asked to call the Macomb County Sheriff's Office at (586) 469-5151.

You can reach Jim Lynch at (586) 468-0520 or jlynch@detnews.com.

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Escapee still at large

Teen also escaped youth home in '05

By Chad Halcom
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

An escapee from the Macomb County Juvenile Justice Center remained at large Wednesday and officials said it's not the first time he had broken out of the Mount Clemens facility.

Search efforts continued for Jordan Danski, 16, of Clinton Township, nearly 24 hours after two other escapees had been recaptured in the Tuesday night breakout from the former county Youth Home. During the daylight hours Wednesday, police recovered what is believed to have been Danski's resident uniform along a stretch of Canal Road -- possibly discarded from a vehicle, officials said.

Macomb County Sheriff Mark Hackel, who does not oversee the juvenile facility but whose deputies are coordinating the search efforts, said Wednesday the search is mainly a local one and there is no reason to think Danski left the state.

"We have no information in this case to believe anything like that has occurred," he said. "So at the moment our investigators are pursuing leads and tips and checking with known family and friends."

County officials said Wednesday that Danski is also one of four teens to escape briefly from the facility in May 2005 along with high-profile school violence defendant Eric Schorling. All four teens were recaptured the same day in that instance.

Danski's mother, Betty Danski of Clinton Township, told The Macomb Daily she had not heard from her son since his escape, and his troubles began at age 11 when he broke a few windows and had fights at school.

She also said she doesn't want police to believe erroneously that he is dangerous, and also that a judge ordered him to receive counseling but the youth home never provided it.

"I have no idea where he is, I haven't heard from him," she said. "But I'm worried that the (Wednesday) newspaper stories will leave the impression that he is violent when he's not. I'm concerned about his safety."

Meanwhile, a 10-year male employee at the facility is on administrative leave as of Wednesday, pending the outcome of an investigation and any possible disciplinary proceedings as a result of Tuesday night's escape.

"That's not an indication that there will actually be discipline. That's just standard," said county spokesman Phil Frame. "In that way it's similar to when an officer uses his gun on a suspect, and he then goes on administrative leave while the incident can be reviewed, even if the incident is justified."

In this case, Frame said, a preliminary review of the events Tuesday night suggests the employee was supervising while Danski and the two other residents were allowed to use a room in the facility for some phone call privileges they had earned. The supervisor was supposed to allow the teens in the room one at a time to use the phone, but officials believe he had allowed all three inside at once.

At some point, Frame explained, someone managed to activate a button in that area of the facility that released a sally-port door and a garage door. By the time the employee could lower the garage door again, all three teens had bolted and slipped out under it.

"Those buttons can no longer be used that way," Frame said. "The staff has had those re-wired or modified so that now those doors are released by remote from another location."

Macomb County assistant prosecutor Joseph McCarthy and defense attorney Randy Rodnick both said Danski has been undergoing periodic evaluation and placement in various facilities based on his progress, ever since his 2005 escape.

Schorling was facing adult charges at the time for assault with intent to murder for a September 2004 knife attack on a female student at Romeo High School. Danski was 14 at the time.

Last August, McCarthy said, Danski had shown enough improvement to get out of the Nokomis Challenge Center where he had been placed, and stay with a relative.

"At that point, when he was supposed to be with his grandmother and attend school and abide by certain terms, that's when the wheel started to come off the cart for him," McCarthy said.

Most recently, he had been facing several counts of assault, breaking and entering an automobile and a controlled substance charge and was returned to placement in the youth home. He was to be transferred shortly to the WJ Maxey Boys Training School -- one of the most severe placements for juvenile offenders in Michigan.

"He had known there was going to be a transfer, but recently he'd learned that transfer (to Maxey) was imminent," McCarthy said. "Whether that was the motive for escaping again I can't say, but the fact is he's responded to his placement in a very serious way, and he'll be treated very seriously."

--Staff Writer Mitch Hotts contributed to this report

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http://www.macombdaily.com/stories/030107/loc_escapee001.shtml



Young man honored for turning life around

Thursday, March 01, 2007

By Theresa D. McClellan

The Grand Rapids Press

Sitting in a Pennsylvania facility hundreds of miles from his Grandville home, 16-year-old Keone Muilenberg went over his troubled, criminal past and didn't like the looks of his future.

Keone entered the criminal justice system at 15, accused of stealing his father's car. He also was accused of helping set up a robbery that injured the victim.

He found himself in adult court on a charge of conspiracy to commit unarmed robbery.

Meanwhile, other parts of his family life presented a bleak picture.

His mother died in a traffic crash when he was in the eighth grade. His brother faced an attempted murder charge, while another sibling was in and out of jail.

"My family structure was shaky. I was like, both my brothers are going to jail forever. What do I have to gain?" he recalled in a video recorded last year as a source of hope and encouragement for juvenile justice workers and parents.

That video, created by Kent County Juvenile probation officer Traci Murphy, and Muilenberg's story, propelled him to the top of the nominated pack. A four-member state board chose him to receive the state's highest 2007 Youth Achievement Award from the Juvenile Justice Association of Michigan.

Now 20, he was to be recognized at a noon luncheon today in Lansing and receive a \$500 savings bond and a \$100 gift certificate.

He is proud of himself today and has dreams and a future. It wasn't always so.

But once away from negative influences, something changed for Muilenberg.

The courts had tried detention, probation and finally an out-of-state program. While in juvenile jail at the Glenn Mills Institute, an alternative program in Philadelphia, Muilenberg studied hard and graduated as valedictorian. He earned a 29 on his ACT and last year was accepted into the pre-med program at Michigan State University with scholarships and grants.

Murphy nominated him for the honor, which recognizes success stories among youths ages 17 to 21. He is the first person from Kent County to receive the recognition in its nearly 20-year history.

Murphy said she used Muilenberg's story to inspire parents and justice workers.

Family Court Judge Patricia Gardner will speak during the luncheon today.

"I have a number of kids who stand out, but he does significantly. It never surprises me whenever a kid turns it around," she said.

"But when that child has experienced loss and criminality and negative peers, this kind of 180-degree turnaround is tremendous."

Muilenberg is back in Kent County, working at his father's business selling cars and thinking about starting his own car-detailing business. He needs to save money to return to school.

He left MSU after a year when his finances became tight and he saw his younger sister headed down a criminal path.

"When she started to spiral, I felt responsible for her and didn't want her making the same mistakes," he said.

Send e-mail to the author: tmcclellan@grpress.com

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March 1, 2007

Citing Abuses, Texas Governor Ousts Leader of Youth Agency

By [RALPH BLUMENTHAL](#)

AUSTIN, Tex., Feb. 28 — Gov. [Rick Perry](#) removed the chairman of the [Texas](#) Youth Commission on Wednesday over charges that the agency covered up the sexual abuse of incarcerated juveniles.

Mr. Perry also called for the ouster of the acting executive director, the appointment of an independent inspector general and a shake-up throughout the commission, which runs 13 schools housing 3,000 felons under age 21.

“Leadership starts at the top,” a spokesman for Mr. Perry, Ted Royer, said. “And the governor believes the very top leadership has failed.”

Late Wednesday, the State Senate voted unanimously to demand that the governor appoint a conservator to take over the commission temporarily.

On Tuesday, the Senate Criminal Justice Committee disclosed details of long-secret investigations by the commission and the Texas Rangers showing that two supervisors at the West Texas State School in remote Pyote routinely roused boys from their beds for sexual encounters that were reported but went unpunished by the school superintendent, who now has a top leadership position at the commission. The supervisors were allowed to resign without facing criminal charges, but are now under investigation.

The dismissed chairman, Pete C. Alfaro, is a former mayor of Baytown who was first named to the commission in 1995 by Gov. [George W. Bush](#) and was appointed chairman by Mr. Perry in 2004. Mr. Alfaro did not respond to messages seeking comment. His latest five-year term expires in August.

Hours after the governor’s spokesman said that Mr. Alfaro had been told by phone that he was being replaced by his vice chairman, Donald R. Bethel, a spokesman for the Texas Youth Commission, Tim Savoy, said the agency had received no notice of the action. The board has a meeting scheduled for Tuesday.

Mr. Perry, [a Republican](#), also called on the board to replace the acting executive director, Neil Nichols, who is the general counsel and a 33-year veteran of the agency. Mr. Nichols took over last Friday upon the sudden retirement of the executive director, Dwight Harris, who started as a caseworker in 1981.

The governor said Ed Owens, deputy executive director of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, had agreed to serve as the commission’s acting executive director.

Though the governor makes appointments to the seven-member board, he has the power by himself only to remove the chairman, legal experts said. He can fire members upon a finding of gross fiscal mismanagement by a legislative audit committee made up of

the lieutenant governor, who is the president of the Senate; the House speaker; and two other members from each chamber.

Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst on Wednesday demanded sweeping changes in the commission.

Senator John Whitmire, a Houston Democrat and chairman of the Criminal Justice Committee, said Wednesday that he had “no confidence in the board” but that Mr. Perry was not yet ready to seek its ouster.

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Article published Mar 1, 2007

Genoa man reports harassing phone call

A 32-year-old Genoa Township man reported to the Livingston County Sheriff's Department that a man he has never met called to tell him that his former wife is trying to find someone to "rough him up," police said.

However, the Genoa man was then arrested when police learned he had two outstanding warrants in Keego Harbor, near Pontiac in Oakland County, for failing to appear in court for a misdemeanor charge.

The man said his ex-wife wants to see their children, but he will not let her because he has an order from the state Department of Human Services that says she cannot.

He claims the caller also told him that his wife was carrying around his picture and asking people to rough him up.

The call was reported at about 8:45 a.m. Feb. 13.

Additional information was not released.

Thursday, March 01, 2007

New welfare reform program coming to Genesee County

By Todd Seibt

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FLINT — Cassandra Holder, 24, of Flint, hopes that a new JET program for welfare recipients helps her life take off.

“The programs are there to help, they are not there to be a standstill,” said the mother of four children under age 7.

She is enrolled in the nursing degree program at Baker College, taking three classes with assistance from JET.

“They are they to help you get on the right road,” Holder said.

State and local officials today announced JET — the Jobs, Education and Training welfare reform program — is launching in Genesee County. JET grew out of pilot programs in Kent, Oakland, Sanilac and Wayne counties.

“JET fundamentally changes the way we move families off welfare and toward self-sufficiency,” said Marianne Udow, Michigan Department of Human Services director, said at a local news conference.

“The program supports them in developing job skills and moving permanently to self-sufficiency.”

See complete story in Friday's Flint Journal

JET program expands

Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) Director Marianne Udow and Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth Deputy Director Andy Levin made the announcement.

By [Jocelyn Deming](#)

WEYI NEWS

Posted: Thursday, March 01, 2007 at 11:24 AM

[Michigan Department of Human Services](#) (DHS) Director Marianne Udow and Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth Deputy Director Andy Levin showcased the expanded Jobs, Education and Training (JET) welfare reform program that will help Genesee County families secure long-term employment and become self-sufficient.

Beginning in September 2004, a broad-based welfare reform work group developed a new approach to creating permanent work force status for DHS clients. JET grew out of this work group and pilot programs in Kent, Oakland, Sanilac and Wayne counties were included in the fiscal year 2006 DHS budget. A net savings of \$16 million is forecast for fiscal year 2007.

The program will cost approximately \$40 million to implement, but is expected to result in \$56 million in grant savings. Preliminary results in the four pilot locations show that caseloads are holding steady or slightly declining. In areas that did not offer JET, there was a 5 percent increase.

JET expanded to serve 19 counties into 2007 and will help Michigan meet new federal work participation requirements. The program is a cooperative venture between the departments of Human Services and Labor and Economic Growth, Michigan Works! Agencies and Michigan Rehabilitation Services.

"JET fundamentally changes the way we move families off welfare and toward self-sufficiency," Udow said. "The program supports them in developing job skills and moving permanently to self-sufficiency."

JET is a win-win-win for Michigan. For welfare recipients, it's an opportunity to qualify for - and keep - good paying jobs. For Michigan's businesses, JET is supporting the workforce and skill needs they have today and for the future. For the state, it means more Michigan residents gaining their independence in good jobs and leaving the welfare roles and contributing to the tax base again.

"The JET initiative is just one example of Governor Jennifer Granholm's efforts to promote economic development and increase jobs to transform Michigan's economy," Levin said. "Her economic plan has been set in motion and it's beginning to work to

attract new businesses and diversify our economy. The governor is continually improving our business climate to make our state more attractive to businesses so they'll locate and expand and create jobs here."

The JET program:

- Uses a thorough up-front assessment and Family Self-Sufficiency

Plan to tailor supports and services to the individual
circumstances of recipient and family.

- Expands educational and training opportunities so clients gain the skills they need to get a good paying job in high-demand fields.
- Focuses career and technical training opportunities on jobs the Michigan economy has available (e.g., health care, construction.
- Provides supportive services when clients face serious barriers to work, with the goal of reducing and removing those barriers so clients can participate in work or work preparation.
- Provides advocacy and support for those who are making application for Supplemental Security Income.
- Extends post-employment support from 90 days to 180 days to help clients retain jobs and prepare a plan for advancement.

"The welfare reform plan will meet federal work participation requirements within the federal time frame, protect the safety net and help people become permanently attached to the labor force so they can move their families out of poverty," Udow said. "Self-sufficiency is better for families, and what is better for families is better for children."

For more information about JET go to www.michigan.gov/jet



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

Contact: Maureen Sorbet or Karen Stock (517) 373-7394

Welfare reform program will put people back to work and help Genesee County families achieve self-sufficiency

March 1, 2007

FLINT – Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) Director Marianne Udow and Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth Deputy Director Andy Levin today showcased the expanded Jobs, Education and Training (JET) welfare reform program that will help Genesee County families secure long-term employment and become self-sufficient.

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- Uses a thorough up-front assessment and Family Self-Sufficiency Plan to tailor supports and services to the individual circumstances of recipient and family.

-MORE-

- Expands educational and training opportunities so clients gain the skills they need to get a good paying job in high-demand fields.
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- Extends post-employment support from 90 days to 180 days to help clients retain jobs and prepare a plan for advancement.

“The welfare reform plan will meet federal work participation requirements within the federal time frame, protect the safety net and help people become permanently attached to the labor force so they can move their families out of poverty,” Udow said. “Self-sufficiency is better for families, and what is better for families is better for children.”

For more information about JET go to www.michigan.gov/jet

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